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POEM,

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE

PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY

OF

YALE COLLEGE,

August 18, 1847.

BY

LUZERNE RAY.

THE COMING AGE.

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NEW HAVEN:

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NEW HAVEN, August 19, 1847.

MR. LUZERNE RAY,

Dear Sir,

In behalf of the Connecticut Alpha of the Phi Beta Kappa, we have the honor to present to you the thanks of the Society for your Poem recited last evening, and to request a copy for publication.

Respectfully,

LEONARD BACON, }
JAMES MURDOCK, } *Committee.*
JAMES HADLEY, }

HARTFORD, August 20, 1847.

Gentlemen,

In the faith that the request of the Society which you represent for the publication of my Poem, is not a mere formality, but the expression of a judgment that it merits, in some degree, that honor, I yield the manuscript to your disposal.

Very respectfully,

LUZERNE RAY.

Leonard Bacon, }
James Murdock, } *Committee.*
James Hadley, }

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THE COMING AGE.

[“ *L'age d'or qu'une aveugle tradition a placé jusqu' ici dans le passé, est devant nous.*”—St. Simon.]

ON the mount of spirit-vision,
In the break of day I stand,
While the flakes of silver starlight
Faintly fall on every land ;
Darkness dwells around, but slowly
Cloud and shadow are withdrawn,
In the East the mountains brighten—
Brighten with the blush of dawn.

Lo ! another AGE is rising,
In the coming years, I see
Hopes and promises of blessing,
Light and Love and Liberty ;
All of good the Past hath garnered,
All the Present yet hath won,
Fade before the glorious Future,
Like the stars before the sun.

Truth for every eye is shining
In the fullness of that day ;
Joy and Hope, descended angels,
Rest, no more to pass away ;
Freedom comes and lifts the captive
From the dungeon of his woe,
And all streams of mortal being
Deeper, purer, sweeter, flow.

Now from every dawning mountain
 Shapes of beauty seem to rise,
 Bathed in rosy light, and soaring
 Upward to the kindling skies;
 Heralds of the Future are they,
 Splendors of the coming sun,
 Smiling down the blest assurance
 Of a better Age begun.

* * * * *

Earth was made for man to conquer,
 Not in one swift victory,
 But by patient toil and struggle
 On the land and on the sea;
 Round the awful form of Nature,
 Clouds of gloom and shadow roll,
 Waiting to be pierced and scattered
 By the lightning of the soul.

Much is known—for Thoughts have battled,
 And their triumphs fill the Past,
 Few in earlier years, but growing
 More and mightier to the last;
 Knowledge moves in widening circles,
 Central light intenser glows,
 And into the outer darkness,
 Truth her burning arrows throws.

Much is known—but more remaineth;
 Deep beneath concealing cloud,
 Powers and elemental Forces
 Work forever in their shroud;
 Facts are seen—but not their causes,
 Laws—but not the governing Hand,

And the mind must wait and wander,
Ere it reach the promised land.

Forward now into the Future—
Lo ! the darkening mists are fled,
And the noonday sun of Knowledge
Pours its light on every head ;
Nature hides her heart no longer,
All her veils are rent away,
And her 'secret place of thunder'
Opens to the common day.

Science moves no longer slowly,
But her eye is keen and bright,
Piercing down the depths of being,
Rising to the loftiest height ;
Fruits from every region bringing
For the healing of mankind,
And the lights of life revealing
To the lowest, darkest mind.

Dawns already the sure promise
Of a brighter day at hand,
When the Thoughts of men shall conquer
Truth, from sky and sea and land ;
For the passing years have given
Signals, as their scrolls unfurled,
And among the stars of heaven
Set *one* sign before the world.

Midnight in the glittering city !
Pleasure claims her dearest hour,
And a million hearts are yielding
To the magic of her power ;

Time on silent wings is speeding,
 Dance and song pursue his flight,
 'Let the morrow bring its sorrow,
 Joy alone shall reign to-night.'

Far apart in his lone chamber
 Sits the student of the sky,
 Careless of the gay ones round him,
 As of bubbles that float by
 On Life's restless, rolling river,
 For it is his mighty plan
 To win down a star of glory,
 Virgin since the world began.

On the tablets spread before him
 Spells of magic might are drawn,
 Shadows of a power that reaches
 Far beyond the earliest dawn;
 Science wings the soaring spirit,
 Guides it in its dim career,
 Through the glittering star-forest,
 Flying on from sphere to sphere.

Vision fails, but Thought still presses
 Upward with victorious wing,
 Toward the planet-throne that waiteth
 Humbly to receive its king;
 Onward, never checked nor swerving,
 Till to starlight fades the sun,
 And the glorious goal is circled,
 And another world is won.

But the COMING AGE shall bring us
 Higher marvels of the mind,

Greater and more glorious triumphs
 Than all time has left behind ;
 Nature's forces, tamed and humbled,
 To the might of man shall bow,
 And her lightnings blaze in beauty,
 Round his all-commanding brow.

Earth resigns her richest treasures,
 All her secret cells unlock,
 And the freshest of her fountains
 Gush from every smitten rock,
 The whole frame of things material ;
 Mighty harp of countless strings ;
 Touched by conquering spirit, answers ;—
 Through the world the music rings.

* * * * *

FREEDOM! fairest of earth's angels,
 Every gift from thee alone
 Takes its highest charm and glory,
 All must fade if thou art gone ;
 Birds of sweetest song may warble,
 Gales of paradise may blow,
 Flowers of Eden-beauty blossom,
 Lights of purest brilliance glow,

But in chains the heart will languish,
 And the flaming eye grow dim,
 Paleness steal the rose of beauty,
 Strength forsake the fettered limb ;
 All things wither, life is lonely,
 Slumbering wind and stagnant wave,
 Failing pulse and fainting spirit
 Fill the being of the *slave*.

Tyrants of the soul have plotted
 Since the Ages long ago,
 With the name of God, to hallow
 Every deed of crime and wo ;
 Forging sacred chains and fetters
 For the sea and for the shore,
 Till the last life-spark was smothered,
 Thought itself was free no more.

See the 'Œdipus of Nature'
 At the bar of bigots stand,
 Terrors of the 'Church' around him ;
 Death and shame on either hand ;
 By the fluttering world forsaken,
 Lonely he must meet the blow ;
 What the crime for which he suffers?—
 He has dared to *think* and *know*.

In the shadow of the mountains,
 At the dawning of the day,
 With the guarding rocks around them,
 And the roaring floods at play,
 Stooping age and sturdy manhood,
 Child and mother gather nigh,
 For an hour of sweet communion
 With their Father in the sky.

Hark ! the hunters are upon them,
 Shouts and curses fill the air,
 Flashing swords and hoofs of iron
 Drive them from their secret lair ;
 Far into the sheltering forest,
 They have fled in fear away ;
 What the sin that stains their spirits?—
 They have dared to *sing* and *pray*.

Oh ! the Past is all oppression,
 Heart and soul and brain and hand,
 Chains for each—the rack—the prison—
 Flaming stake and bloody brand—
 Open Scorn's 'unmoving finger'—
 Slander's sly, envenomed bite—
 This the crown and these the laurels,
 They have worn who loved the light.

Hath the day of gloom departed
 From all eyes forever more ?
 Is the sun of Freedom pouring
 Cloudless light on every shore ?
 Are the heavy fetters broken
 From the heart and from the hand ?
 Doth the heaven-descended spirit
 Walk upright in every land ?

Oh my country ! thou that fillest
 All the earth with Freedom's *name*,
 Sounding glory through thy trumpet,
 With the only echo, shame ;
 Preaching, preaching still the doctrine,
 'All are equal, all are free,'
 But the necks of millions galling
 With the yoke of slavery.

Oh my country ! tears and blushes
 Cannot cleanse thy guilt away,
 While the groaning of thy captives
 Sounds to heaven from day to day ;
 While the man, of mind immortal,
 Like the beast, is bought and sold,
 And the crushing hand of Power
 Turns his blood and sweat to gold.

But the Future brings deliverance,
 Certain as the rising sun,
 Comes the perfect day of Freedom
 To the long-degraded one ;
 Man no more shall wrong his brother,
 Chain his hands and blind his soul,
 Till around the deathless spirit,
 Clouds of deepest darkness roll.

From the homes of old oppression,
 Songs of ransomed captives ring,
 Russian Czar and Turkish Sultan
 To the shrine of Freedom bring
 Costlier offerings, richer treasures,
 Than the mines of earth can yield,
 And more glorious than all laurels
 Gathered from the 'tented field.'

Liberty is marching onward,
 Onward still in every land,
 Fetters fall and dungeons crumble,
 Touched by her delivering hand ;
 Freer swell the winds of heaven,
 Freer rolls the ocean-wave,
 On the wide earth lives no longer,
 Tyrant-lord or suffering slave.

* * * * *

From the grave of buried Ages,
 Whither Memory turns again,
 Faint and fainter in the distance,
 Sounds the tramp of arméd men ;
 Trumpets ring, and swords are gleaming,
 Millions down to death are hurled,

And the constant roar of battle,
Is the music of the world.

Nation thunders against nation,
Where the bristling ranks are set,
Hate and Rage and fire-eyed Fury,
All the fiends of earth are met ;
Now they join—the hills are shaken,
Smoke ascends and blots the sky,
Veiled in cloud and flame, they struggle,
Bleed and groan, 'despair and die.'

Not alone the wild barbarian,
In the midnight of the soul,
Counts his glories by the murders
Marked upon his bloody scroll ;
Not alone the pagan victor,
In the conquering years of Rome,
Asks the splendor of a triumph,
Bringing captive thousands home ;

But in lands and times named Christian,
Glory wears his bloody bays,
Whirlwind-force and tiger-courage
Still must have the loudest praise ;
'Love'—'forgive'—commandeth Jesus,
'Kill'—'destroy'—his followers cry,—
Such, Oh Christ ! thy meek disciples,
Such the children of the sky.

Must the sword devour forever,
Always slay and never spare ?
Must the horrid din of battle
Always ring upon the air ?

Man the beast and Man the angel !—
 Must the lowest always reign ?
 Hath the sun of heavenly Gospel
 Shone a thousand years in vain ?

Far away in tropic regions
 Stands a city by the sea,
 Peace and Joy are in her dwellings,
 All her sons are gay and free ;
 But a wrathful storm is rising,
 Wafted by the north wind's breath,
 Comes a nation's navy, laden
 With the furniture of death.

Round the close-beleaguered city
 Ranks of arméd strangers stand ;—
 Wherefore come the wanderers hither,
 Far from home and native land ?
Murder is their 'glorious' mission,
 They are here to burn and slay,
 And to tear from countless bosoms,
 All the joy of life away.

Hark ! the cannons lift their voices,
 Rushing through the parted sky,
 Iron bolts of mortal thunder
 To their dreadful duty fly ;
 Bombs are bursting, walls are tumbling,
 Ruin roars from land and sea,
 And the swift feet of the flying
 Drip with warm blood flowing free.

Women, children, rush for refuge
 To the temple of their God,



Wildly begging at his altar
 Mercy from his scourging rod ;
 Safe, Hope whispers, sure no danger
 Dare invade this hallowed ground,
 Here the heavenly arms shall shield them,
 While Destruction thunders round.

All in vain their prayer to heaven,
 Mercy weeps, but cannot save,
 And their holy house of refuge,
 Shrinks and darkens to their grave ;
 Through the broken roof descending,
 Bursts the shell amid the throng,
 Shrieks and groans and bitter wailing
 Fill the place of sacred song.

Dead upon the marble pavement
 See the innocent children lie,
 With their cold and quiet faces
 Pleading upward to the sky ;
 Pleading in their silence, louder
 Than the loudest spoken word,
 Crying unto God for vengeance ;—
 And in heaven that cry is heard.

And for *this*, 'joy-bells' are ringing
 From our consecrated spires ;
 And for *this*, the stars of evening
 Fade before our earthly fires ;
 And for *this*, triumphant banners
 Wave their bloody stripes on high,
 And a drunken land's hosannas
 Roar against the peaceful sky.

Glory to the conquering hero,
 Let your loudest clarions ring,
 Shout with all your million-voices,
 None but he shall be our king ;
 Justice, mercy, love, religion,
 Bow to his victorious sword,—
 Let them sink and let them perish,
 None but he shall be our lord.

But not so I read the Future,
 There the best, the highest stand,
 And the Samson and the Cæsar
 Are the base ones of the land ;
 There the crowns and thrones are given
 To the monarchs of the mind,
 But the slayers and destroyers
 Are the outlaws of mankind.

There the sword is hid in darkness,
 There the trumpet's piercing tone
 Wakes the quiet world no longer
 When the blast of war is blown ;
 Peace unfurls her snowy banner,
 And by all the breezes fanned,
 Lo ! it waves in wondrous beauty,
 From the towers of every land.

There 'the thunder of the captains,'
 And their shoutings die away,
 Melting into Love's sweet music,
 Like the darkness into day ;
 And the chorus of the nations,
 As the rolling years increase,
 Rises in harmonious numbers,
 Peaceful to the PRINCE OF PEACE.

* * * * *

Fleeting dream and mocking vision ?

Vapors, by the darkness bred ?

Shapes unreal, for a moment

Seen, and then forever fled ?

Is it thus that Hope deceives me ?—

No, the face of Truth is there,

Shining down from highest heaven,

To the dungeons of despair.

Thou that walkest in the darkness,

Waiting, longing for the light,

Till thy heart hath grown half-hopeless

Of a day more pure and bright ;

Courage, for the morning cometh,

Lift thine eyes and read the sign,

And though all around thee falter,

Still be faith and patience thine.

What if fears and doubts oppress thee ?

What if words of promise fail ?

What if trusted ones prove traitors ?—

Right is strong, and must prevail ;

In the wide field of opinion,

Seeds of Truth are thickly sown,

Wait, and thou shalt see the harvest,

When a few swift years are flown.

Faint not, fear not, still press onward,

Do the duty at thy hand,

Work for Knowledge, Peace and Freedom,

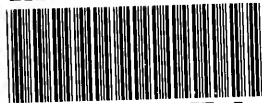
Till their blessings fill the land ;

Let the coward seek his shelter,
Let the sluggard hug his bed,
From HUMANITY'S great battle,
Hide not thou among the dead.

Thou shalt conquer, thou shalt triumph,
Where the host of Truth has trod,
March the stars in all their courses,
March 'th' eternal years of God ;'
In the vast, advancing army,
Find thy place and take thy stand,
And the weapons of thy warfare
Hold with firm and faithful hand.



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